

THE HOUSE OF SUSPICION

Weldon Boldly Enters the Mysterious Mansion Guided By a Strange Old Man Who Leads Him to a Splendid Reception Room and Departs.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

John Denham, an aged millionaire, wishes to make a posthumous test of his theory that mystery, backed by the hope of gain, is the strongest influence in the world. Accordingly, a year after his death, his lawyer, Malby, appears in the Wanderers' Club and tells the story of the House of Suspicion, which stands on the outskirts of the town.

A peculiarity of the house is that if a man stands alone before the gate in the high wall around the grounds in the middle of the night it will open apparently of its own accord. According to Malby, several men who have entered the house have never returned. Weldon, one of the Wanderers, is so impressed by the story that he tests its accuracy.

CHAPTER III.

The House of Suspicion.

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WALKING again down the block, having turned his back upon Carr, a rather lively collection of thoughts ran through Weldon's head. Primarily, he felt something very nearly akin to anger. He suspected that he might have made a fool of himself. In all probability, despite his expressed disbelief, Malby might have been merely amusing himself and the others with the weird tale of the House of Suspicion and its uncanny gateway, big enough to accommodate a truck, yet opening only to one person at a time.

And if that should happen to be the case, well, he was thoroughly acquainted with Mr. Carr. For not less than one month that gentleman would diversify himself and the rest of the Wanderers Club with a gaily embroidered account of the advance upon the House of Suspicion, painting Weldon as the indomitable investigator, pounding fearlessly upon the heavy gate! Passing, too, to more immediate considerations, it was cold and late and they were a long way from home. At best, neither could roll into bed now before 1 o'clock, and if the suburban cars maintained their usual midnight schedule, 2 would be more probable.

However, he had started the adventure; now he might as well carry it through to whatever conclusion. Later on, he would take his medicine like a man and wait patiently for a chance to return the compliment to Mr. Malby. Thinking thus, he reached the gate.

He stared at it almost reproachfully. Certainly, a piece of work like that looked fit for any sort of mysterious doings. Why, the thing was heavy enough to have been brought from a feudal castle. Had it been a little lighter in construction, Weldon, in his present mood, would have been almost inclined to try kicking it in or climbing over it! Perhaps ten seconds of consideration, and he was still wavering between knocking once more or admitting the defeat of his foolish project. He decided, however, upon a final try. His hand reached up, his fingers were upon the knocker—and Weldon started back with a little gasp. Not that the gate but the other was moving! For an instant, it seemed to stick; then with a little creak it swung slowly inward!

Before him, shrouded in shadow, lay a broad driveway, apparently of asphalt. At the end, against the sky, he made out the massive outlines of the house itself. A faint light shone here and there in the windows; except for that the place was only a huge, pitch-black mass. But he was not allowed great time for analysis. Out of the darkness came a thin, old voice:

"Enter!"

"Er—who?"

"Will you enter?"

The gate began to swing back, gradually, into place. It was too much for the man without. What little fear he had felt at the first startling opening of the way was now more than overbalanced by a gnawing curiosity.

"By George! Yes," he cried softly. Two strides and he had passed through. The gate returned to its original position. Quite alone, Mr. Weldon had penetrated the House of Suspicion! A sudden sense of solitude, or helplessness, came over him. He wished most heartily that Carr was at his side. He felt an indefinite but rather keen regret that he had ever undertaken the absurd feat.

But as he turned to find the owner of the voice, he knew some relief. Surely the danger was slight from the custodian of the mysterious gates, a bent, aged man, small of frame and somewhat feeble of aspect. Weldon gathered his senses for speech. His thoughts were interrupted by an abrupt command:

"This way, sir!"

"But where?"

"To the house, sir. Come quickly." Weldon found himself being led rapidly up the path, a thin hand upon his arm. Almost at a run, so swiftly went the tottering footsteps of his guide, he was approaching the broad entrance of the house itself. His curiosity arose once more, overwhelming all other considerations. What manner of place was it? What sort of insanity had given birth to this situation? A solitary man had approached the gates, they had opened, now the man was being led, evidently with definite purpose, toward the empty, mysterious dwelling.

"I say—" he began again. "Silence, sir, please."

Weldon shrugged his shoulders. From the street behind the knocker set up a sudden clatter. He stopped short. Carr's voice followed, after a brief pause. Then came the clatter of the bronze and the shout together.

"Look here, old gentleman!" Weldon said abruptly. "There is a friend of mine out there who—"

"But one may enter here, sir."

"That's all right, but how the deuce do I know?"

"You are at perfect liberty to return now, if you wish. You can never come here thereafter."

Weldon stared at him in the faint light. The old man's face was expressionless as marble. He faced Weldon apparently without the slightest emotion. Whatever his role in the odd play, it could never be read in his countenance. The visitor was fairly staggered. There seemed to be no desire to detain him against his will, yet, if he left, he was assured that he would not return. He hesitated for an instant only. Then:

"Lead on, Macduff!" he said, with a faint attempt at joviality. "I don't know where the devil you're leading, but lead on, anyway!"

The old man bowed, and started again toward the house, and Weldon kept at his side with an eagerness he made no attempt to deny or to control.

Nor did they pause at the foot of the wide half-dozen steps that lay before the main doorway. Upward went the hobbling steps of the old man and after came the investigator.

Contrary perhaps to his expectations, the door did not fly open of itself. The keeper of the gates laid a hand upon the knob and swung the portal back. Weldon walked in and looked around eagerly. There was absolutely nothing unusual, at least on a superficial examination. He stood within a broad, well-furnished corridor, lighted dimly here and there by an incandescent lamp. To his right he saw a comfortable looking reception room, finished beautifully in some dark wood, and hung with pictures which even his inexperienced eye perceived to be splendid art. To the left

He turned abruptly and shuffled toward the door. Weldon, staring with amazement, called after: "Say! Hold on! Where are you going?"

"Must leave you alone, sir."

"But—"

The old hand went up again, as if commanding silence and stifling argument. The figure of the guide disappeared down the corridor and an instant later Weldon heard the big outer door close softly.

To the best of his knowledge, he was quite alone in the reception room of the House of Suspicion! He looked around curiously.

"Well, of all the crazy freaks—and existing right at the borders of one of the biggest cities in the world—pshaw!" he murmured disjunctly.

Then his gaze settled upon the envelope. He bent over the thick thing

He saw merely another envelope, slightly smaller and bearing a similar inscription, and beside it lay a sheet of paper. The latter he picked up eagerly, and for two or three minutes pored over the half-dozen typewritten lines.

"Humph! More enigmas, eh?" His hand dropped to his side, and Weldon stared somewhat absently at the table. "The Satsuma vase, in the southeast corner of the drawing room!" He dropped the paper into his pocket and laughed shortly. "All right! The Lord hates a quitter! We'll interview the Satsuma!"

He stepped across the corridor and into the elegance of the drawing room. For a moment he took his bearings, then having located mentally the southeast corner, nodded briskly and crossed the room. It was

to the empty room. "It's as good as the gold it represents, or my three years in the bank were wasted. By Jiminy!" He burst out laughing, and the laugh echoed queerly in the stillness of the deserted house. "I'm glad I dropped in here!"

Without further ado, he placed the bill carefully within his wallet, and nodded again, with much satisfaction. "Now this is taking on a tinge of real human interest!" he chuckled, as he opened the sheet.

It was typewritten, and the lines were very close together. Evidently, the writer had had much to say; evidently, too, he had had some time in which to say it, whoever he was, and wherever he might have written the letter, for the first few lines showed most excellent grammar, and a construction of the clearest and most

He Finds An Envelope Containing Directions to Look In the Satsuma Vase; Here He Finds Another Envelope, In It a Hundred Dollar Bill.

and looked again at the one-hundred-dollar note, reposing alluringly in his wallet. The sight seemed somehow to aid him to a decision in the matter. "That's genuine!" he repeated. "Who can say that the rest of it isn't, as well?"

Looking from the window into the fathomless blackness of the grounds, Weldon's struggle went on. His contracted eyes rested long and thoughtfully upon the faint rays of the street lamps, reflected dimly upon the bare boughs, as they looked over the walls.

"Well, I wish to Heaven that I knew whether or not I wanted to walk out to those trees again or not!" he cried, almost helplessly.

Minute after minute went by. Far off a church clock tolled a single stroke, the hour of one! As if awakened by the sound, Weldon turned and faced the empty reception-room. A little uncertainly, he walked back to the table with its mysterious envelope, and there uncertainty vanished. "I'll

do it!" he cried, suddenly, with an emphatic pound of his fist upon the board.

A vigorous nod accompanied the words. Weldon brought forth his card-case and took therefrom one of his own little pasteboards carefully, he laid it beside the envelope and grunted a little.

"Well, the die is cast!" he cried. "Now—what was it? Ah, yes! The little door to the rear of the corridor."

It stood before him. He approached without hesitation and turned the knob. The door opened and disclosed a faintly lighted corridor. Weldon turned and took a last look at the place he was leaving. Then the door closed with a little slam—behind him!

Entering just then, one might reasonably have considered the House of Suspicion quite as deserted as it had been an hour before, when Weldon accomplished his desired entry!

(To be continued next Sunday.)



Looking Into the Unknown

TWO VIEWS OF THE LIFE AFTER

Nothing Is Unreal; Nature Is Everything

By CAMILLE FLAMMARION.

THE unknown of yesterday may be recognized tomorrow as truth. When genius leads the way and a new discovery is made it is but natural that people in general should be left behind that they should not immediately understand the ways of progress.

The discovery of the Roentgen rays, so inconceivable and so strange, ought to convince us how very small is the field of our usual observations. To see through opaque substances, to look inside a closed box, to see the bones of the human body through flesh and clothing seemed at first absolutely impossible to the average mind, but the fact that it could be done was another eloquent example in favor of the axiom that it is unscientific to assert that realities are stopped by the limit of our knowledge and observation.

Very often things are called "supernatural" which are only wonderful, inexplicable. Everything is to be found in nature, the known and the unknown, and there is no such thing as "supernatural." That word has no meaning.

I know perfectly well that there are people who will shake their heads and laugh at some of the things I am about to tell, and who will feel superb contempt for my endeavor to penetrate into regions hitherto considered impenetrable. I hear them say:

"You know perfectly well that such so-called glimpses beyond our ordinary horizon are only imaginary, because for us death ends all."

But no—I do not know it, nor you either. You know nothing about it, and your affirmations, like your negations, are mere words. All human aspirations protest against annihilation. Idleness, dreams, hope, and justice cannot be pure illusions any more than the bodies we wear on earth. Why need we despair of ever knowing the nature of the thinking principle which impels us to know whether it will survive the death of our bodies?

My excellent friend, General Parmentier, one of our most distinguished and trusted savants, told me the following incident, which occurred in his own family:

Several persons had met for a luncheon party given at Andian, in Alsace. They were waiting for the master of the house, who had gone out hunting, but time passed and they sat down at table without him, his wife saying: "Still, that bill's genuine, that's absolutely certain. And the letter says—um!"

He rose, walked into the corridor, looked around. The place was as blank of helpful suggestion as his own brain. He crossed once more to the reception-room. "Of all the crazy problems a man was ever sent up against, this goes the limit and a little to spare!" he confided to the table. "I've got the hundred, I've got the option of walking out of that door with it, never to return. Or, if I choose, I may go on, into—what?"

He scowled at the floor. "That's just it—what? I know what I've got now, but I don't know what I'm going to get, if I obey this infernal puzzle's orders. Why, there's no telling that it isn't—"

He broke off again, and took to walking up and down. Once only he stopped under a lamp in one corner

The Soul's Existence Manifesting Itself

By MAURICE MAETERLINCK.

WE who live today are fortunate to have been born at a time when the human soul, which has been dormant for centuries, is beginning to make a mighty effort, when manifestations of it are seen everywhere—urgent, pressing, yes, even imperious.

It is evident to all who understand to read the signs of the times that the human soul must be preparing for the decisive struggle; but none of us dare foretell the issues that may be dependent upon the result, be this victory or flight.

Perhaps never to this day has it enlisted in its service such diverse, irresistible forces. It is as though an invisible wall hemmed it in, and one knows not whether it is quivering in its death throes or quickened by a new life.

I will say nothing of the occult powers, of which signs are everywhere, of magnetism, telepathy, levitation, the unsuspected properties of radiating matter and countless other phenomena that are battering down the door of orthodox science. These things are known of all men and can easily be verified. And truly they may well be the merest bagatelle by the side of the vast upheaval that is actually in progress, for the soul is like a dreamer, enthralled by sleep, who struggles with all his might to move an arm or raise an eyelid.

Other regions there are where its action is even more effective, though the crowd there is less careful and none but trained eyes can see. Does it not seem as if the supreme cry of the soul were at last about to pierce the dense clouds of error that still envelop it in music? Do not certain pictures by foreign painters reveal the sacred majesty of an invisible presence as it has never been revealed before?

Are there not masterpieces in literature that are illumined by a flame that offers in its very essence from the strongest beacon fires that lit up the writings of bygone days?

Though it be perhaps from the tablelands of speculative thought that these signs are most clearly to be noted, yet there may well be signs in the most ordinary paths of life, unsuspected of all, for not a flower opens on the hilltop but at length it falls into the valley. Has it fallen already? I do not know. But this much is abundantly proved to us, that in the humdrum lives of the very humblest of men, spiritual phenomena manifest themselves—mysterious, direct workings that bring soul nearer to soul, and of all this we can find no record in former times. The reason must surely be that these things were not so clearly evident then; for at every period there have been men who penetrated to the inner recesses of life, to its most secret affinites, and all that they learned of the heart, the soul and the spirit of their epoch has been handed down to us.

It may well be that similar influences were at work even in those times, but they could not have been so universal, as active and vigorous as they are today, nor could they have penetrated so deeply into the very life springs of the race, for in that case they had surely not escaped the notice of those sages and been passed by in silence.

of water proves it, and this circumstance was noticed at the time. One is led to think that it was the psychic force of the dying man which thus made itself known to several persons at the same time, a fact which does away with the theory of an illusion.

We are in the midst of a mystery, and all we can do at present is to try to form a hypothesis, which may or may not be correct.

One must necessarily come to the conclusion that there is a spirit world, of which we occasionally get a glimpse, but which ordinarily in our present state of ignorance is a closed book to us, a book which later generations shall undoubtedly be able to read with perfect ease.